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QUAD  
a journal of art and literature

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BIRMINGHAM-SOUTHERN COLLEGE

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*Cover Photograph by Bobby Gilbert*

A poem  
like a heavy-eyed fish  
darts and hovers  
in the shallows  
of my page  
while I stand,  
barbed pen in hand,  
aiming  
at its reflection

**Barclay Browne**





**Katherine Crawford**

## Twilight on Bourbon Street

one  
Shadows of jazz note blue  
just behind me, between the buildings,  
Dance within the new blown river fog.

Pearls, like fortunes from Chinese cookies,  
Drop from saxophones and balconies,  
As rain slowly surrounds

two  
Lovers and children  
threw coins  
as if  
his guitar case  
were  
a wishing well.  
And once upon a time  
I heard him sing—  
so blue pure  
that I knew all  
his tears and loves  
from that  
first note.

Chris MacDonald





Bente Flatland

## Mrs. Emily

The sun had not shone through the south-east bedroom window over fifteen minutes before Emily was on her feet. To keep dressing for work less miserable, she had to light the gas heater in the cramped bathroom quickly. James Paul would hit the floor soon, and she would never be late with his breakfast. He wouldn't say a word if it happened, except maybe out of surprise. Emily, though, would never think it proper.

As she heaved wood into the family's stove, the wind whipped around the corners of their small wood house. Emily Sullivan never thought in terms of rich and poor. She knew those with easier lives, but she knew folks in worse shape, too. I never understood how she pictured many other families with a worse lot in life. Somehow Mrs. Emily counted blessings in her life that none of her friends could see. "Breakfast will be right ready," she called toward the bathroom, "and the Today show'll be on. They're on that big ship out in the Gulf."

James Paul still had a good twenty minutes to finish his coffee before leaving for the county stone quarry where he'd worked for some twenty-three years. He could finally count the months until his retirement, now less than a year away. Emily was needlessly mothering him about not being late. But, mothering is what she'd been forced to make as her life's work. Work would begin again as soon as Mrs. Emily stopped waving goodbye and James Paul drove away.

The boys were never a task for the feeble hearted. As usual, Emily would start with Mark, while she still had all the strength her restful night's sleep had provided. Viral meningitis at nineteen months had confined Mark to little more than a worthless, barely functioning shell. But this shell grew over twenty-five years to a large young man—a young man alive but without a life. Mark's condition, nor his formidable challenge each and every day, ever slowed Mrs. Emily, though. He was her firstborn—her darling, innocent child.

Emily maneuvered the gurney next to Mark so she could wake him enough to coax him over

onto it. This rolling cot resembled an ambulance stretcher, but it could not be as long because it wouldn't roll through doorways and down halls. Once onboard, Emily covered Mark to block the bedroom chill; he would be at such a disadvantage if he ever contracted pneumonia that Emily must always guard against this. In the warm bathroom Emily could remove his pajamas and bathe him throughly.

Click, click, click, click, click. Anyone close to the family could identify the sound coming from the bathroom. Mark was wide awake by now, but no help at all. Emily was fighting her regular battle with the hoisting machine that lifts Mark from the gurney or his wheelchair and allows him to be swung over and placed on the toilet seat. This machine was an ugly, mechanical response to nature's cruelty.

Having lowered the "bucket without a bottom," so that she could fasten the four leather straps beneath Mark's thighs and buttocks, Emily tugged with the shoulder harness that would keep Mark's upper body from going limp and toppling him from the toilet. "Finally," she said aloud. Then she thought silently, "Lord, how you give me the strength to do this, I'll never know."

Again, click, click, click, click, click filled the house as Emily turned the crank tightening the straps and chains on the hoist. James Paul jokingly called the medieval torture-chamber looking machine the Pot-O-Matic. But he, too, spent his time on the crank for Mark. The machine lifted Mark from off the gurney so Emily could swing his body directly over the toilet. Then, she lowered him so that he sat. She would leave him on the toilet from fifteen minutes to an hour and a half before his bowels moved. It was too costly if she removed him too soon. If Mark didn't go daily and on schedule his intestine would become impacted or he would do his business whenever and wherever the urge came.

James Paul and Emily's prayers were abundantly answered when she had given birth to Bobby, four years after Mark had been born. Even as a baby he had strikingly handsome features.

Black hair, skin that became golden brown under the sun, and mysterious blue-grey eyes that would captivate anyone who came across him.

In sixteen years time, the high school senior girls swooned over him at their prom. Bob grew into the perfect young man. He grew into a six foot, sculptured, athletic frame, and he grew into a responsible student. This senior football star and state record holder in track made a ninth grader's heart stop dead with a simple, "Hey Melissa." Bobby's attention, though, was not to fuel his ego, because he had little. He had merely remembered her name.

All the years Bobby grew in attention, Emily never lessened her attention to Mark or anyone else in need in the mostly rural community. James Paul naturally thought the sun rose and set in Bobby alone. Bob was his pride, joy and, along with Emily, his future. But all of James Paul's promises of more togetherness and a better life for Emily, Bobby and Mark were to fall short of reality.

In the past year there was hardly a sentence off James Paul's lips that didn't speak of how he would make Mrs. Emily's life easier after he retired. But the hot Alabama summer after Bobby's high school graduation held a much different and cruel plan for the family. The first day of June was James Paul's last.

Bobby rose early with his mom and dad. Nothing much was on the agenda for the day. James Paul didn't intend for his first day of retirement to hold a lot in the way of work around the house. Peas, beans and squash were just beginning to be picked, so he and Mrs. Emily gathered what ripe vegetables there were before the temperature got too high. "Why don't I run down to the job?" James Paul asked Emily, not really expecting her to answer. "Them boys'd get a kick out of me showing up the first workday in twenty-three years I didn't have to."

Emily replied, "That's fine with me. Pick up a loaf of white bread on your way back. You're not going to stay through lunch are you?" "No, I'll be back before long."

Bud Clark was the first to spot JP, as they called him, as he drove up and got out of his pickup. "JP, any one of us should've known habit would throw you in the truck and cart you down here." The quarry foreman, Harry Shepard, had walked up and followed with "Habit or no, I be damned if I'd be here my first day of retirement. Can't Mrs. Emily find you a whole list of shit to do?" "Hell—I'm not gonna retire just because Betty *would* give me a list," Bud shot back.

JP strolled into the middle of the quarry towards where the front-end loader filled the dumptrucks constantly filing in and out. As he hopped on the loader's side to talk with the operator who took over his job, the new operator let the loader jerk against JP's body. The huge yellow Caterpillar tractor threw JP away and under a dumptruck backing up to be loaded. The familiar beeping warning of a backing dumptruck had no special power to keep the back tires on the huge truck from rolling over James Paul. No one could tell Mrs. Emily his real last words, but all the men joined in saying they were of her and the boys.

September came and brought an end to the summer that almost killed Mrs. Emily and Bobby. Mark never understood his dad's death any more than anything else that went on in his routine life. Mrs. Emily was so proud when Bobby went off to the university that Fall on scholarship. She told Mark what it all meant as she struggled with him alone every day—even though he didn't catch a word.

Mrs. Emily hardly had a minute to rest without James Paul's help with Mark, in the garden, and around the house. The church, neighbors and Bobby at college kept Emily busy with all the things which brought her joy in life. Of course, in a way caring for her first child brought her joy, though it wasn't joyful to do. Even though her home was more lonely than ever now-a-days, it never contained any more love than it still did today. And, hopefully, Bobby's new challenge in college would bring a new breath of life into the family.

The fraternity's open Fall party was a blast.

## *Winner of Outstanding Prose Award*

Out of twenty-two pledges to the chapter Fall semester, Bobby was easily a standout. Even with a full schedule and football practice, Bobby had become pledge president and was very popular with most upper classmen. Popularity with the girls went without saying. While Bobby loved the attention, especially when it was being expressed on a Friday or Saturday night, he never dropped his modesty. It was the charm of his "I'm just your regular old guy" approach that drew affection and friends like nothing else.

Sometime shortly after 1 a.m., Bobby set out from the party walking his date, Stacy Davis,—who everybody called Stace—and another young partier, Kathryn Tower, back to their girl's dorm. Stace was a very cute girl with a great personality. Kathryn, whom Bobby had just met that evening, turned out to be the real knockout. He couldn't quite figure why she was leaving alone with Stace and himself, but he didn't make a habit of questioning his good fortune, either. Stace or Kathryn would be an ideal end for the night of a great party. But, with the gentleman in him tempering other ideas, he knew he would end the night with his date. "There will be next week anyway," Bobby thought to himself.

The three talked and laughed as they made their way down fraternity row and through the parking lots. Each girl carried a beer. Bobby had one in hand and an extra in his coat pocket. One would not last all the way to the dorm. They were far from drunk, but leaving the fraternity house was no reason to leave the beer.

From seemingly no where, a small sportscar sped up behind the three youths. The female driver was too drunk to have any control over the vehicle. As he should, Bobby walked along on the outside of the girls and took the full impact of the steel and fiberglass as it plowed into his body. Bobby's right arm snatched Stacy to the ground as neither had any warning of the impending blow. Bobby's body crashed hard against the pavement and his right forehead slammed into the asphalt. His brain sloshed backwards in whiplash then forward against his skull as he came to a rest on the ground. He was out. At the hospital, the neuro-

surgeon said if he lived the next seventy-two hours, he might eventually live again at home.

For the next thirteen weeks Emily sat up with Bobby in the hospital. Then, recovery continued slowly after Bobby returned home. Mrs. Emily quickly discovered what kind of people run the real world. The drunk girl who put Bobby into a coma, out of which he slowly recovered into a vegetable, was formally charged with nothing more than drunken driving. Her family was rich and wielded some influence in their city and at the university. Mrs. Emily never heard so much as an apology for what had happened to her son. However, the girl and her family were interested enough in fixing her car that they sent Mrs. Emily a bill for the cost of the shattered windshield.

No hardship in Emily's life had prepared her for this treatment. Surely her Christian life did not give her the understanding to handle the likes of that girl's family and such self-centered greed. All she knew how to do was see for her boys and be a friend to others.

This she did, and at least Bobby was much less trouble than Mark had been for over twenty-five years. Other than daily exercises to keep his muscles as toned as possible and moving him around the house, Mrs. Emily had little to do in caring for Bob. Now he spent his once active days simply staring at the television, a painting on the wall, or out into the yard. Seven more years of Mrs. Emily caring for her two precious sons passed. No person could have any greater love than Mrs. Emily showed Mark and Bobby. What more than love could be her inspiration to go on?

In the Spring of that seventh year, when everything else was coming alive after a winter's sleep, Mrs. Emily was left with her firstborn. The difficult son she started motherhood with would be her daily companion—at home, in the garden, at church. Still, Mrs. Emily was never heard complaining. When asked how she was getting along, she simply said, "Oh, fine. We're making it just fine." And, sometimes . . . sometimes Mrs. Emily talked to her close friends of a higher plan—a plan she didn't know—but in which she had faith that everything would be better.

**Larry Kirkland**





Rose Nguyen

## *Homeland*

My eyes wonder at the subtle shades of green, I've seen  
Colouring my father's beloved Ireland.  
This emerald shroud overlays mountains  
From jagged peak to slope descending,  
Never ending, covering cradled cottages  
Stone walls, and me.

Thoughts succumb to aromas of scones and tea  
Declining with the clouds, across the sea  
Into the fish and chip streets,  
Seeping through pub doorways where stirs a beckoning  
Comradery.  
Ballads rise above the ring of mugs, glass against glass.  
Arm in arm, a lad and a lass sing together, Voices,  
Friends and strangers joining in song, but I long  
For the silence of the bay.

Through the laughter and the windows I see,  
Across the water and over the deathly  
Quiet and deserted boats of fisherman's sons,  
The ascending hills from which I sprang.  
Against the cold slate of the dock I lock  
My hand, fingers rigid, my eyes perusing  
Those hills, forgetting the drunken cries.  
Looking at me a church of five centuries,  
Erected by hands long gone, guards the graves  
Of ancestors who watch the waves.

I turn from their eternal gaze, the air  
Suddenly whispering of rosemary. A dim specter  
Holds me fast.  
On war-clad steed a ghostly knight casts  
His glance to mine, slashing the encroaching fog with his sword  
Raised in defense of his Ireland.  
An image in flight  
His pride is my birthright.

**Janie Shelswell-White**





**Lisa Andrews**

## *Sacrifice Morning*

I never noticed.  
I never noticed the way his hair  
falls,  
Over his temple, painting his skin gold.  
I never noticed.  
I never noticed the thin, clean lines  
his veins draw on his hands.

His hands.  
His hands which reached  
for his mother's breast,  
which reached for my finger,  
holding as tightly as  
a cobweb.

I, have been called.  
His voice rang my name like so many  
pebbles spilled into a dry, clay pot.  
"Take your son Issac . . ."  
I must touch this hand.  
I must open these eyes.  
I must take him.

The morning light has betrayed me.  
I once welcomed its blanched yellow  
warmth as it sifted,  
tracing each thread of my tent.  
It stumbles now, beats down,  
too bright, too warm,  
too early.

I hope.  
I pray  
that He will wake me  
with the itch  
of a harsh, wool cloak,  
or the scratch  
of a thin, pointed thorn.

Can I kill  
our only son?  
She will think me mad.  
She will sting me,  
like nettles,  
like poisoned serpents,  
like glass shards.

She will not know.  
They will not know.  
But the flames,  
the screaming, bathing flames  
will know.  
And Issac, and I  
will know.

Can I kill our only son?  
Can I give our only son?

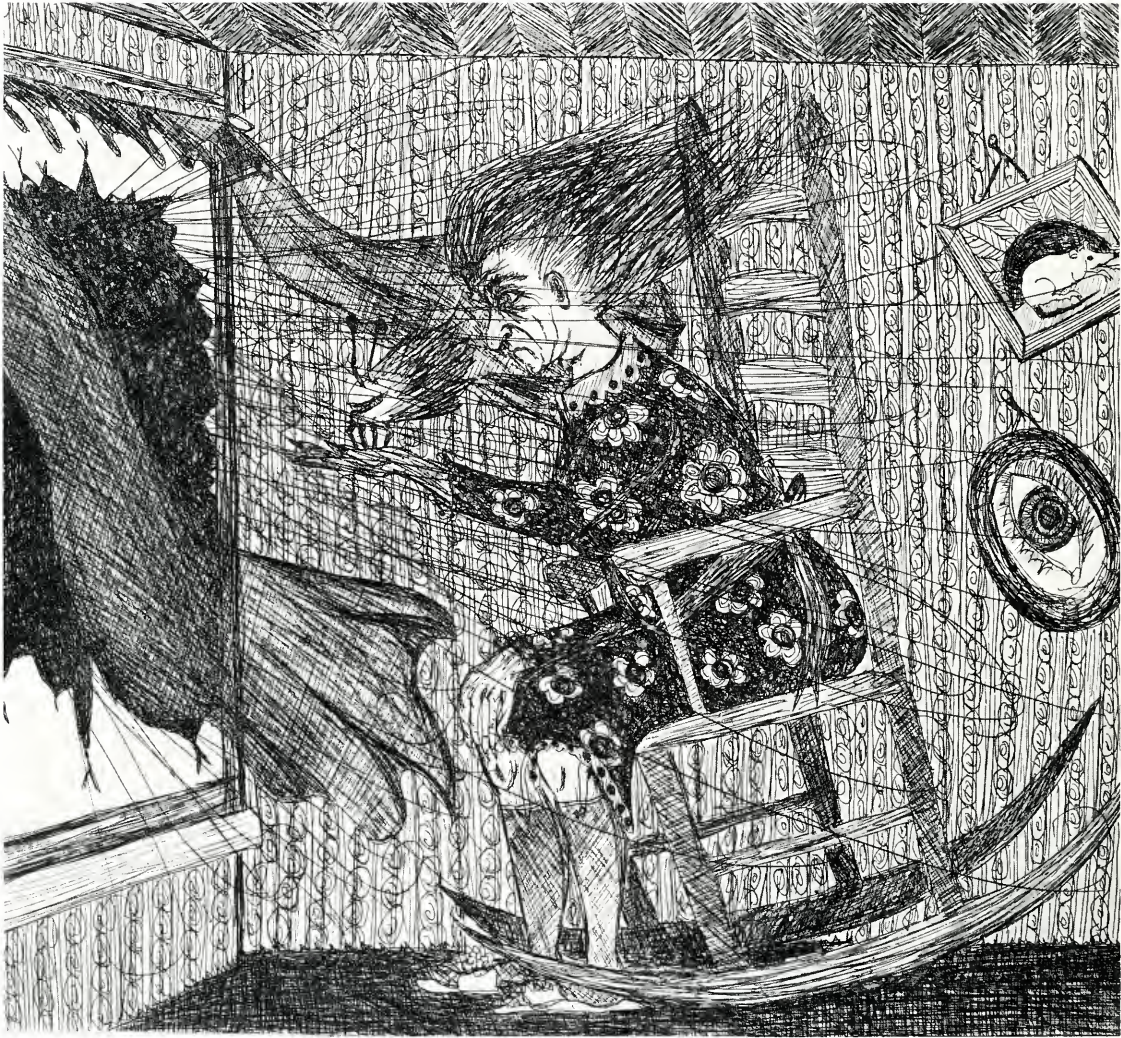
The wind is rising,  
blowing the sand from beneath my feet.  
I am shaking.  
I am trembling  
like a mortal  
at the sight of God.  
Like a mortal . . .

My bones,  
my blood,  
my very flesh knows  
what I will do.  
My bones,  
my blood,  
my very flesh knows.

I must move.  
The wind pushes light at me  
like hordes of grain-sized locusts.  
Always gnawing,  
clinging,  
urging me  
to remember.

I have been called.  
His voice rang me name like so many  
pebbles spilled into a dry, clay pot.  
"Take your son Issac . . ."  
I will touch this hand.  
I will open these eyes.  
I will take him.





Sydney Scott

### *Northport's Witch*

She was an old black widow taunted  
by us who knew  
she slept on top of the shack.  
The bloody scriptures covering her  
door were not written with paint  
we said. Although none of us would approach her  
door, we would laugh from our cars  
at the witch who sermoned telephone poles  
because no one else would listen.

**Donald E. Yessick**

## Life is a Solo

In his younger years, Dad had been a big football star at good old Witfield High School. He was known as Tank, because, as legend has it, whenever Johnny Ward got hold of the football, the center of the field looked as if a tank had gone through it.

I was supposed to be Tank Jr. "It's all up to you to carry on the Ward-pigskin tradition son," Dad would always tell me. He constantly reminded the coach how he couldn't wait until I reached the sixth grade and could join the pee-wee football team.

When that day finally arrived, Dad took me to the sports shop. He bought me a little pair of shoulder pads, a little pair of cleats and a little helmet, all for his little Tank Jr. and all against little Tank's Jr.'s protest. I loathed sports and wanted to be left alone with the my American stamp collection.

"This was all your mother's doing wasn't it? I knew we should have bought you that football instead of that damn mint set for your birthday," was Dad's answer of my problem.

Dad was set on me playing football and got his way—for a moment anyway. I went out for the team, made it, then quit the same day. I only agreed to go out for the team. There was nothing in our contract on staying for the whole season. Dad was furious.

Every year Dad would ask me if I was going out for the team and every year I had the same answer—no. Mother always had to calm him down by explaining how I was just going through a phase. That phase lasted through elementary, junior high, and high school.

I decided to compromise by going out for band in high school. Dad was even more furious this time. I told him this was the closest I would ever get to running down the center of a football field. He agreed.

I tried out for band and made it, mainly because half the percussion section was graduating and the Director was in desperate need of a bass drum player. It was the perfect instrument to play, because the bass drum offered me fewer hassles compared to the other instruments. The school already had a bass drum so I didn't have to buy one. Also, I didn't know that much about music, except for the three months of piano lessons at age six, and the bass drum seemed simple to learn how to play.

Band turned out to be a lot of fun. The afternoon practices in the rain were the exception. But I was able to play all the great masterpieces—*Charlie Brown*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, and *Funky Town*. Actually, performing on the field, in parades and at pep rallies gave me a new appreciation for the bass drum. After all, it was the bass drum that set the rhythm for the rest of the band.

The only thing I didn't enjoy about band was the away-football games. They were disasters. Whether the bus broke down or there were no dressing facilities for us, something usually went wrong.

The game played at our rival school during my senior year had the most memorable performance of my band career. That Friday morning started out cloudy and turned to rain by noon. The temperature hovered around 45 degrees. When the band left by afternoon, it was still raining and getting colder. By the time we reached our special marked-off bleacher at our opponent's field, the rain and stopped but the cold continued. Most of the band members had to blow warm air constantly through their instruments to keep reeds from splitting and valves from sticking.

The first quarter was perfect, at least from the band's point of view. We didn't score any points. This might have upset the coach, but it meant the band didn't have to play the school fight song. No one was thrilled at the thought of lips frozen to brass and silver mouthpieces. I certainly wasn't looking forward to wrapping my hands around two chrome-handled bass drum mallets with the wind chill at 10 degrees.

The second quarter we weren't so lucky. West Kinterbish fumbled the ball and Witfield High captured it running 35 yards for the touchdown. Only a few clarinet reeds split during the fight song that followed, and all together we sounded pathetic. Seeing this, the band director decided to cut the half-time performance by two songs. We were to play only a fanfare and the *William Tell Overture*.

At ten minutes until half-time, the band left the stands to warm up. With three minutes remaining, we moved on to the sidelines. Our band was with the visiting team so we performed first. This is a an old



football tradition done as a form of courtesy. We got into position at the half-time buzzer.

Tonight's routine was very simple. In six parallel lines, the band was to form a pyramid. The trumpets were at its base followed by the saxophones, clarinets, and flutes. On the fifth row was the percussion, except for me. I formed the sixth row. Actually, I wasn't a row, but a dot. I became the point of the pyramid.

We planned to march in place playing the fanfare from *Superman*. About half-way through the piece, the band was to make a 180 degree turn and march to the center of the field. The *William Tell Overture* came next. Exiting off the field, we were to play the fanfare again.

Over the loudspeaker came the introduction. "Ladies and gentlemen, we proudly present the Witfield High School marching band. Tonight's selection We planned to march in place playing the fanfare from *Superman*. is a traditional favorite—the *William Tell Overture*. The drum major roared, "Band Ready!" Then, she clapped her hands, counting out loud, "one-two-three-four." Four short blows from her whistle followed.

I began marching in place, hitting my bass drum on every second and fourth note: One-hit-three-hit. This is the music I played to play for almost every piece the band performed. The bass drum has only one sound and the variations for playing that sound are limited.

As I was marching in place I could hear the trumpets blaring and the clarinets squealing up and down their musical scales. I began to think how boring I must sound to those people up in the stands. My bass drum has no flamboyant notes. Just one-hit-three-hit.

There is never a bass drum solo. The trumpets got all that. It's not my fault this instrument is so big and heavy that I can't do fancy dives and ducks like the saxaphones. I have to stand straight.

Even though I was the most important instrument in the band, no one noticed me. It was me, and not that little pharaoh in front of the pyramid waving her arms, who really led this band.

I don't care if people listen to me. One-hit-three-hit. One-hit-three-hit. I know I have value. One-hit-three-hit. One-hit-three-hit. I know my level of importance to the musical world. One-hit-three-hit. One-hit-three-hit. I know...I know...I know I've been standing still playing one-hit-three-hit for a long time.

I slowly made my 180 degree turn and in front of me there was a big empty space. In the center of the field was the Witfield High School marching pyramid playing the *William Tell Overture*. I had become a fallen block.

I ran toward the pyramid to be recemented. As I ran, the bass drum began to bounce against my body. At first it was a light bounce, but as my pace increased so did the height of my bass drum's bounce. This not only made it difficult to play my one-hit-three-hit, but I could't see where I was going.

I had no other choice, but to commit the ultimate band taboo—I looked down Luckily, I was on the fifty-yard line. I just followed that bright, white chalk line. I followed it all the way into a deep, brown mud puddle.

Immediately, I fell forward, rolling over my bass drum and ending up in the mud on my back, all while continuing to play one-hit-three-hit with the bass drum resting on my stomach.

The hard part was next—getting up. I had to hurry, because the band was almost through playing and I would be left on the field to be run over by the West Kinterbish band. After several attempts of what must have looked like a woman nine months pregnant trying to rise from a waterbed, I managed to stand.

I rejoined the pyramid and marched off the field covered in mud. Everyone was staring and pointing at me. I continued to play. One-hit-three-hit. One-hit-three-hit. There was a silence in the stadium when we were finished. Then there was a solo applause from across the field. I turned around and saw a figure standing and clapping. It was Dad. That one person clapping soon turned into a splattering of claps. It spread to out opposing team on the other side of the field. Slowly the spaces filled until the whole stadium was full of applause. I finally was the star of the football field and had my bass drum solo too.

*Winner of Outstanding Photography Award*

*My Camera the Surgeon*



**Frank Wall**

### *Peanuts*

Through the blank-faced businessmen  
I walk smiling, trying to prompt a response.

People too preoccupied to acknowledge a stranger  
hurry on through the park  
accepting no interference.

I walk slower than they do  
to notice fat, filthy pigeons  
pecking at dusty crumbs.

A lonely, whizened man quits mumbling  
at a slow, brown bird to glance at me.

His eyes implore me to buy  
his week-old, fresh roasted peanuts.

“Peanuts, young lady?” he asks.  
Embarrassed, I smile, put on my sunglasses  
and pick up my pace.

**Heather A. West**

I remember, with stiff frozen eyelashes, a feeling of sad and confusion mixed as if in a stirring pot (iron glowing orange).

I remember not understanding in that cold (so icy, brown cold), small room with the wooden box and the person who's not a person anymore inside.

I looked in at the Dead Person (not my grandmother, never no more?) and felt like I could slide my finger, child-hot and soft, down the candlewax-white cheek and hold my hand there and watch white droplets squeeze between my fingers as the hard finality melted into a pool again.

There was a little, shiny, round, wooden table with a frilly, red, soft cloth on it and I pulled off a golden tassel and there was a Bible on the cloth with a fresh, new, never-been-opened smell. I turned the crinkly pages blankly until I felt a cool hand roughly push my hand away and walk me out into the spattering sunlight,  
but I didn't cry.

**Ted Haigler**

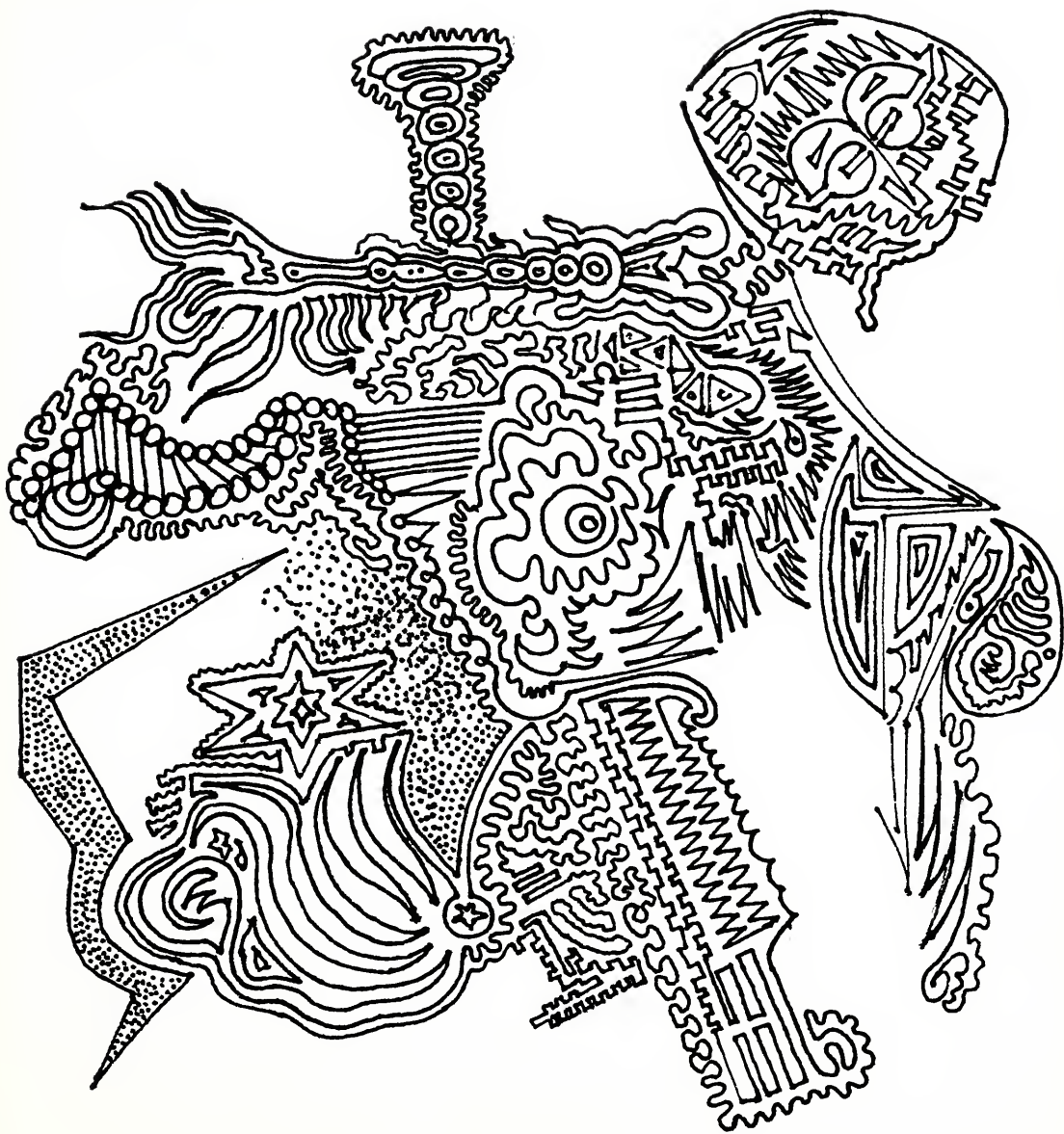


## *Mr. Groovy*

Back seat limo driving cabaret dude  
Dresses in black and gets the blues  
He's got the rot thick and gravy  
Gonna twist like a pine into the freon stream  
Way up high and low and behold we believe  
he's a spectacle on his elliptical pew  
When he's coming around it's time for a  
disconnection mode jello party  
Baby loves around him abound eager to  
trump his overgreased ace of spades  
Find his friends along the clotted stream  
Mr. Groovy is a dream of fluffy cream  
Mr. Groovy is a scream dream

**Joe Goldstein**





## *The Big Time*

When Niki and I were little our Grandmother sat us down and asked us "Why?". Why, she wanted to know, were we so mean to each other and why did we fight and why couldn't we give our poor father some peace? Couldn't we see that he just wasn't himself? Couldn't we just be nice to each other? I don't remember what I said to her but I do remember Niki kicking me and then running off, probably to break one of my toys. If Grandmother were still alive I'd tell her she shouldn't have wasted her breath. Niki and I were born hating each other. We probably fought in the womb.

Of course I can't remember back that far. The first fight I do remember having with Niki was right after our Mother's funeral. We were six and ignored even though the house was full of people. Sometimes someone would pat me on the head or shake Niki's hand but mostly they talked to our Father and Grandmother. I remember Niki crying, maybe I cried too, I don't know. But what I remember most clearly is that Niki took my hand, led me into the kitchen, picked up a broom and hit me over the head with it as hard as he could. I screamed. He screamed. We both got a spanking from our Aunt Martha and a lecture from our cousin Jean Claire. I blamed Niki and he blamed me and that's the first fight I remember. It's funny though that our father didn't get mad at us. He just looked at us with that vacant stare that set in after Mother died and spread until it killed him too. But that was a long time ago. At least it seems like a long time ago.

So I still wonder why, knowing what she knew, did our Grandmother leave half her house to Niki and half of it to me, like we could split it in two or something. She had to have known that it would mean one more argument, one more reason for the two of us to snarl at each other. When the will was read I swore up and down that I would never, ever set foot in that house as long as Niki owned half of it and he swore the same. The next day he showed

up at the front door with his wife, Moody, and his T.V. set and I showed up at the back with my cat. I should have turned around right then and gone back. I almost did but when I thought about where to go back to I stopped. I could picture myself in my car up until I reached the end of the driveway, but I didn't know if I would turn left or right when I got there. So I looked at Niki and said, "I'm staying." He said, "Well so am I."

I'd been working behind the counter at a Bama Auto Parts store for almost six years, until Grandmother died. I knew it all. Every part number and function. Guys were always asking me out on dates, but I never went because the kind of guys that hung out in the Auto Parts store were hardly my type; not that I had a type really. Anyway, I'd rather watch T.V. with my cat.

Niki has a great car; a 1967 Valiant, with red leather interior, that had belonged to my father and only needed a little care to be a class-A car. But Niki let it fall apart. The interior was shot to hell. Some guy Niki pissed off had gotten drunk one night and slashed up the seats with a hunting knife. The back windshield was smashed out and Niki had taped some plastic over the hole. He had also screwed up the transmission because no body told him there was such a thing as transmission fluid. And the tires were gone. Niki sold them to buy a wedding ring for Moody. When Moody showed me the ring I laughed. But not because it was funny. Niki's been trying to sell the Valiant for a month now. It just sits in the front yard on cement blocks like some sort of stranded fish with a "For Sale" sign on its forehead. He's asking six-hundred dollars for it. I laughed at that too.

Maybe that's why I quit my job. I never wanted to know how much Niki should charge for his Valiant. I wanted to know more and know better things than that. But, it seemed like the easiest thing to do. Just to graduate from high school and get a job and work at it for six years, I did better than Niki at least. In the past six years he's

had ten different jobs. Now he's working at the Purina plant outside of town slaughtering chickens for Cat Chow. He smells like chickens when he comes home at night and he wears these knee-high black rubber boots that he can't seem to get all the blood off of. Moody tells me all the time how proud she is of him.

Moody's pregnant. Really pregnant. She looks like she could pop any minute now. When she told me I could have cried. It seems like such a waste to me that Moody should even be married to Niki, much less have his baby. She's a beautiful girl, the kind that tells you to have a nice day and really means it. When Niki married her I had hope. He was nice to her and I could tell that he loved her and I thought that maybe this would be the thing to change Niki into a human being. I don't know now. Maybe he does still love her but it's getting harder for me to believe that. Last week he threw an ashtray at her. He missed but he didn't even apologize. I find it hard to talk to Moody because I'm always wanting to tell her to get while gettings good.

Last Saturday Moody and I were sitting at the kitchen table. She was making up a list of names for the baby, copying them out of a *T.V. Guide*, and I was reading one of these *World Book Encyclopedias* that I bought before I quit my job. The door bell rang and it was this old man that wanted to look at Niki's car. I showed it to him and I almost just stood there and let him look but then I felt guilty. He was dressed really nicely. His clothes didn't look expensive but they were neat. He had on a clean gray suit and a thin burgundy tie with clocks on it and a straw hat that looked brand new. He didn't seem to know much about cars. He didn't even ask to look under the hood. I told him everything that was wrong with the Valiant and even showed him where Niki had covered up some rust with touch-paint. I knew Moody could hear me because all the kitchen windows were open and I could hear her clearing her

throat. The old man shook his head and thanked me for being so honest with him. He looked sort of pale and I could see that he was sweating pretty heavily so I asked him inside for a Coke.

He didn't want a glass for it, just drank it straight out of the bottle. He said his name was James Culverhouse but that we could call him Jim. I introduced myself and Moody. He said that our names were as pretty as we were. Moody asked him what he would name a baby if he had one.

"Well me Mother was named Shelley. I've always been fond of that name. You're expecting are you?"

Moody laughed. "Can't you tell?" she asked him.

"Well then." He smiled a little and for a minute nobody said anything.

"How about boys?" I asked him, mostly to have something to say.

"Conrad."

Moody's eyes opened up wide and she wrote the name down and put a star next to it.

Jim finished his coke and said he had to go before the Post Office closed. I offered to walk downtown with him. On the way he told me he wanted a car because he was getting too old to "traipse" all over town like he'd been doing. Then I remembered him. I had seen him a lot at the Big Time diner where I used to eat lunch when I used to work and live in my own two-room apartment upstairs from the Big Time, in the DeSoto Arms. It seemed like Jim was always at the Big Time when I was so I asked him if he remembered me. He said he certainly did.

We never made it to the Post Office. We ended up at the Big Time instead. Jim had a turkey dinner and he treated me to a Coke float.

I looked around while Jim talked to me about being old. Above our booth was a painting of a tall, skinny black woman. I guess she was African but there were some hacienda-type buildings be-

hind her. She had a stick balanced on her head and on the stick were some peacocks about the size of and as sickly looking as chickens. I noticed that there was some dried-up ketchup spattered on the canvas.

"You don't realize some things till you get my age. Walking up a flight of stairs is a scary thing. You can't eat like you could. No more huevos rancheros. No more spare ribs. Everything gives you gas. And television isn't funny anymore. I used to love to watch Ernie Kovaks. Did you ever see his program?"

"What about cars?" I wasn't really interested but I like the way he moved his hands from side to side when he talked.

"I had a Pontiac once."

"With a silver Indian on the hood?"

"I believe so."

"That's really great." I finished my Coke float and laid my hands on the yellow formica. They sort of stuck where I lay them. I guess the grease was part of the atmosphere of the Big Time.

Niki and my Father and I had eaten there every Saturday night after Mother died. Niki and I would always fight over who got to sit with Daddy until he would make us sit on one side and face him. That was what we hated though; having to sit there and look into those vacant eyes.

I looked at Jim and asked if he minded if I smoked. He said no and asked if he might have one too. I said sure. They were Virginia Slims and he looked sort of elegant holding one with his long thin fingers. His hand hardly shook at all.

"My daughter had a complexion like yours. When she was younger."

"Really?"

"Sort of olive like yours. Is that the word?"

"Olive? Yeah, I guess."

"She gave me her little chihuahua before she left. I had him for seven years. I called him Ted. After Ted Williams."

"The baseball player?"

"Yes, I lost him last year though."

"I'm sorry."

"You think I should get another cat?"

"I have a cat. I love my cat."

"Well then."

The thing was I could tell how lonely he was, which was probably why I walked downtown with him, but I didn't know what to do. I couldn't sit there all day with him. I don't know why but I suddenly felt terrible and I had to excuse myself and I went in the bathroom. I thought at first to throw up, but then I started to cry. I sat down on the floor of the stall and leaned up against the door and cried. Everything around me was pink, even the air smelled pink, like that canned pink disinfectant. I cried for a long time. Every time I thought I was through and stood up to leave I'd start again. I kept thinking about those clocks on Jim's tie.

When I got home Niki was furious with me. Moody had told him what I'd told him and he kept screaming, "I'm out six-hundred bucks because of you!"

Moody was watching *Love Boat* in the living room and I went in to look at her, to ask her why she had told him. But when I sat down beside her on the sofa she wouldn't look at me. She just whispered "I'm sorry." But she wouldn't look at me so I walked around to her other side and I could see a bruise coming up over her eye. I took my cat into the bedroom and put on the soundtrack to *The Music Man*. I could hear Niki walking around the kitchen, picking things up and slamming them down.

I wondered why it was Niki was always hitting people. He didn't start out hitting Moody, just like he didn't start out hitting me. Of course he stopped hitting me as soon as I got wise enough to hit him back. But Moody would never hit back. Moody was a sweet little girl he met when he was a truck driver. They met in a Dairy Queen is some little backwards town and he whisked her away to



bigger and better things. Of course that's why she stayed and let Niki hit her. What would she go back to if she left? And Niki loved her. But Niki had been hitting people he loved since we were six. He only stopped apologizing after our father died. Before that when I screamed, he screamed.

After a while, when I couldn't hear Niki any more, I went back out into the kitchen to fix myself something to eat. Niki and Moody were sitting on the sofa kissing each other. The only light came from the T.V. *The Lucy Show* was on but the sound was down. They looked nice sitting there, sort of in silhouette with the light behind them. Niki had showered and combed his hair.

There was some spaghetti sauce and spaghetti in the pantry so I put a pot of water on to boil.

"What're you doing?"

It was Niki.

"I'll be out of your way in a minute Niki."

"Are you making something to eat?"

I couldn't tell if he was mad or not by his voice so I turned on the light. He was smiling. Niki was smiling and so was Moody.

"We decided that if it's a boy we'll call him Niki Junior," Moody said.

"It was your idea baby," Niki said and kissed her.

I tried to smile too but I couldn't and I couldn't look at them smile anymore either. All I could see was Niki's slicked-back hair and the bruise over Moody's eye. They didn't seem like anything I'd ever known before. They seemed cheap and dirty and worthless and I felt like if I stayed I'd become that too.

I left the next morning. I didn't have enough money for a hotel so I spent the night in my car with my cat in the parking lot of the Bama Auto Parts store. When Mr. Sims came in to open up I asked him for my job back. He was thrilled. He had missed me so much. I got him to give me an advance and I went back to the DeSoto Arms. My old room was still vacant. "Isn't that lucky?" the landlord asked, opening the door for me. I looked

around my two rooms and bath, at the iron bed and the brown naugahyde couch and said, "Well then."

The landlord excused himself and I put the cat down and opened up a can of Fancy Feast for her. We'd brought all my things up in one trip. I had left the *World Book Encyclopedias* with Niki. Sitting there watching my cat eat her Poultry Picnic Dinner, I started to wonder just what it was I was doing. Just what it was I'd come back to and just where it was I had been. Moving into my Grandmother's might have given me a home if I were the type but I guess I'm not. I guess I'm like one of those bones that sort of floats around in the hand and becomes unattached when a person dies and all that tissue goes away. I guess I'm like that.

Niki told me when I left that I could come back if I really wanted, but before I could say thank you he was kissing Moody again, running his hand down her back and over her bottom. I just left and they never asked me where I was going.

That night I sent out for pizza and watched T.V. I wondered how Jim had known I was crying when I came out of the bathroom at the Big Time. I had wiped all the mascara out from under my eyes and put on some powder. But right when I sat down he had patted my hand and told me how he felt when his wife had died.

"It felt like I was a tree in the middle of a big field. And I sat there at night and watched cars drive by down this long two-lane road. And there was a chill."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Jim?"

But he didn't hear me. He asked if I was ready to go and I told him not quite yet. He looked down at his plate where there was still a little bit of gravy and I could see that there was a hole in the top of his straw hat. I asked him if he wanted me to hold his hand and he said he didn't mind if I did. I guess it's hard to keep your hand from shaking when you're old, but when you're as young as I am it ought to be easy.





## Words

Alone, walking with you, talking to you: alone.  
Passing the transparent people, living make-believe  
lives.  
Causing their trouble, stretching the truth, and  
leaving it for someone else to solve.  
Time goes by. The same time that brought  
us together takes us further apart.  
Or, was it simply chance? For lady luck  
is, too, a fallen woman.  
You and I there, together. You in an orgasm  
of solitude. Me there empty—with you—  
alone.  
Mind over matter; flesh over you.  
You saying . . . something, “Can you not feel . . . ”  
I won’t hear you, can’t hear you,  
Can’t feel it, won’t feel it.  
Time rolling on and we’re there together,  
and I’m there alone,  
and you’re not there  
Then it’s an act, not a feeling.  
A character, not a person.  
Beautiful; sinful.  
Good; evil.  
Death; life.  
Reproduction; fornication.  
Words.  
And I am alone surrounded by the words.  
Transparent—you there. Me, alone.

Suzanne Schmith

*One Step Ahead*



Rob Caslin

### *The Mourn*

Somewhere in the night  
a lonely man cries.  
Here now in a cradle  
a baby slowly dies.  
Why doesn't somebody tell him  
that life is only death,  
Fighting and struggling  
until it takes the last breath?  
Through the cold nighttime  
sleeps the innocent newborn.  
sleep tight, little baby.  
for soon enough  
will come the mourn.

**Stephanie Stabler**

*Crossing on Colbert Creek*



**Frank Wall**

## *Captive*

The boat ramp waits  
silent and still  
by the edge of the river.  
It's grey cement is primed  
with stark straight warpaint  
and pine tree shadows  
serve as camouflage.  
I watch the murky brown water  
swirl in slow varying patterns.  
It moves to an imaginary drum beat  
hypnotizing and rhythmic.  
Its rippling watery muscles pull  
me deeper into its depths.  
Lost in the flow,  
I've been captured by the Warrior.

**Lisa Marie Klein**





Erika Jenke

*Haiku*  
Kate Sheehan

The hollow twilight  
echoes: mother has taught  
her children to fly.

An apparition,  
dressed in silky darkness,  
dances in the storm.

The lightning bugs glow  
together in nocturnal winds;  
I dine alone.

The pond: silent, cold,  
locked in icy emptiness;  
your eyes turn away.

*Haiku is unrhymed Japanese lyric poetry having fixed three line forms consisting of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively.*

**Lisa Andrews** is from Sheffield, Alabama. She is the news editor for *The Hilltop News*.

**Jeffrey Behr** is a senior chemistry major from Dothan. Jeff says his drawing is "from a collection of sketches done by interpreting the meaning of a word found on a "new word" daily calendar as an act of catharsis."

**Barclay Browne** is fresh from a fall semester in France. This is her first time to be published in *Quad*. Barclay is a biology/chemistry major and plans to be a research scientist.

**Rob Caslin** is an art major from Birmingham. Rob's art makes its first appearance in *Quad*.

**Katherine Crawford** is from Mobile making her first appearance in *Quad*.

**John DeWitt** makes his second appearance in *Quad*. His photograph was on the cover of last year's issue. John is a senior soon to leave us for a job in the real world (with a newspaper he hopes).

**Tom Doggett** is an international student from a foreign place—Sumter County, Alabama. At 'Southern, he ended up with economics and business writing majors.

**Bente Flatland** is from over the Mountain in rolling Vestavia Hills. She is a chemistry major and wants to be a veterinarian.

**Rebecca Gilman** is a senior majoring in English. Her poetry has been published in *Frontier*, Middlebury College's literary magazine. Rebecca's play, *Always Open*, was one of ten plays honored in the Young Playwrights Festival at Middlebury and was produced off-broadway in New York. Rebecca won the "Outstanding Prose Award" in *Quad*'s fall issue.

**Bobby Gilbert** is a sophomore majoring in biology on his way to medical school. Bobby's favorite hobby is photography. His photographs have appeared often in *The Hilltop News* and will be seen throughout the 1987 and 1988 yearbooks.

**Joe Goldstein** is a freshman from Homewood having his poetry published for a second time in *Quad*.

**Ted Haigler** is a freshman from Birmingham. Ted is making his first appearance in *Quad*.

**Suzy Hornung** is a junior art major from the metropolis of Columbia Cross Roads, Pennsylvania. Suzy is *Quad*'s new art editor for 1987-88.

**Erika Jenke** is from Huntsville. Her photography appears in *Quad* for the first time.

**Larry Kirkland** has a weekly column in *The Hilltop News*. He is a Biology/Political Science major who has just been accepted to UAB Medical School. Larry reports he is working on his first novel.

**Lisa Klein** says she has spent four years and \$40,000 at BSC and is leaving as an economics/business major to pursue an MBA from the University of Alabama.

**Rose Nguyen** is a junior from Adamsville, Alabama.

**Chris MacDonald** confesses, "I am a junior psychology major minoring in *Quad*. I am a resident of Birmingham, for better or for worse."

**Suzanne Schmith** is a junior political science/English major from Birmingham.

**Sydney Scott** is a junior from Mobile. She is majoring in Art and English.

**Kate Sheehan** is a freshman majoring in English/French. How does Kate feel about her writing? "It's better than speaking," she responds.

**Janie Shelswell-White** is a senior majoring in Advertising. Janie has been published in two previous *Quad*'s.

**Stephanie Stabler** is a freshman from Montgomery planning to major in English and Sociology. This is her first appearance in *Quad*.

**Frank Wall** is from Florence, Alabama. He is a sophomore majoring in mathematics, and eventually plans to go to medical school. Black-and-white photography is "a major hobby" of Frank's.

**Heather A. West** is from Birmingham making her first appearance in *Quad*.

**Donald E. Yessick** makes it three *Quad*'s in row to publish his poetry. He is a sophomore from Northport majoring in computer science and English.

## QUAD Squad

The following students, faculty, staff, and businesses are members of the journal's support organization. Their financial contributions made it possible to purchase eight additional pages for this spring issue.

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